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ABSTRACT

Recent educational reform efforts in the United States have ignored a system-wide articulated plan for preparing students for work, a plan developed and implemented in the 1970s and known as career education. Career education is a broad educational process in which students at all levels receive relevant information and gain experiences designed to prepare them for productive work. Under the leadership of Kenneth B. Hoyt, director of the Office of Career Education in the U.S. Office of Education, career education became the core of school improvement, to be infused into all subject areas at all grades. Career education had the following goals: (1) involve all students regardless of their school plans; (2) involve the entire school program and the resources of the community; (3) unite the students, parents, school, employers, and the community in a long-term cooperative education venture; (4) provide students with information and experiences representing the entire world of work; and (5) support the students with age-level appropriate experiences. The career education movement was in high gear with the passage of the Career Eduation Incentive Act in 1977, but 4 years later the Office of Career Education in the U.S. Department of Education was discontinued. Evaluative studies of career education reported positive results, indicating that if the movement had continued, the work force today might be better prepared. Trends in the 1990s indicate that infused career education may again become popular, and this movement should be encouraged. (KC)

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IMPROVING WORKFORCE PREPARATION; LESSONS FROM THE CAREER EDUCATION MOVEMENT

Dr. Don Clark, NAIEC President & CEO

During the decade of the 1980's, considerable attention was given to the type of workforce skills needed by the labor force to maintain our nation's competitiveness in an unstable and uncertain world marketplace. Public and private organizations, agencies, and institutions responded with excellent research and reporting on workforce skills and competencies required by the beginning of the year 2000. Yet, little, if any attention was directed at another priority — **providing students with a comprehensive educational program focused on careers.**

What is puzzling about this period is that employers were increasingly concerned about the growing mismatch between workforce requirements and job seekers; the impact of the changing demographics; new technology; and students leaving school less able to meet the challenges of the workplace while **the educational reform movement was devoid in calling for a system-wide articulated plan for preparing students for work. There was such a plan — a movement in the 1970's; it was called career education.**

Those of us who were **directing Industry-Education Councils/Alliances at the time the career education movement was launched in 1970 by the U.S. Office of Education (USOE)** could look forward to implementing a thoroughly researched and demonstrated **broad educational process in which students at all levels would receive relevant information and gain those experiences designed to prepare them for productive work.** At last we had a systemwide career education process developed to integrate into the curriculum beginning with the entry of the child into a formal school program and continuing into adult years.

Under the leadership of **Dr. Kenneth B. Hoyt, Director of the Office of Career Education at USOE (later the U.S. Department of Education),** career education became **the core of school improvement** with the development of career education concepts to be infused (not added on) into all subject areas at all grade levels. **Career education was designed to:** (1) involve ALL students regardless of their school plans; (2) involve the entire school program and the resources of the community; (3) unite the students, parents, school, employers and the community in a long term cooperative educational venture; (4) provide the students with information and experiences representing the entire world of work; and (5) support the students with initial **career awareness** (grades K-6), **career exploration** (grades 7-9); **career direction-setting/preparation/placement** (grades 10-12), and provide for **placement follow-through, including re-education if desired.**

My industry-education council's **top priority in staff development** was a **two semester career education in-service program** planned and conducted in collaboration with industry personnel and higher education faculty using the nationwide research and materials developed through the USOE's Office of Career Education. We trained elementary and secondary school teachers, guidance counselors, principals and librarians as a career education team in the infusion process; providing students beginning in the elementary grades with opportunities for **self-assessment** of their interests, abilities, knowledge, and capabilities; **relating subject areas to major career clusters**; and **using occupational information** – all central in formulating career choices.

These and other components of career education such as **employability skills training** and a **school based job placement** program constitute a **comprehensive DELIVERY SYSTEM.** Throughout this process of preparing students for employment, there is an emphasis on the **development of sound work values, positive attitudes toward work,** and **that school work is work also.**

The career education movement was in high gear with the passage of the Career Education Incentive Act (C.E.I.A.) in Congress in 1977. Four years later the career education office was discontinued at the U.S. Department of Education following the repeal of the C.E.I.A., leaving behind a continuing grassroots effort by practitioners well aware of what the movement accomplished – **significant gains in occupational information, work attitudes** and **realistic career planning among participants in career education.**

Evaluative studies of career

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education reported that a career emphasis throughout the total school program provided basic academic skills and skills in assessing individual career interests, developing meaningful work values, seeking job opportunities, and career decision-making. One can speculate what the state of the school reform movement and U.S. workforce would be at this point had the career education movement continued with full support.

For what it's worth – based on my nine years experience as an executive director of an industry-education council and collaborative efforts in work /education programs with counterparts in the U.S. and Canada – I would expect a continuing career education movement after 1981 to have made **a significant impact on education reform and helped create a quite different workforce today** through a much improved school-to-work process.

Looking ahead, there are encouraging developments in establishing a systemwide plan for preparing students for employment in the 90's. **The 1991 Priority of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) – Connecting Schools and Employment** states that "the basis for a highly skilled workforce begins in school years with a range of effective and appropriate instruction and work-related experiences that allows students to reach high school graduation prepared to enter immediately the world of work, to continue in some form of post-secondary training, or both." In support of the statement, Council members have delineated principles for action and strategies for implementation of these principles.

At the local level, the **Los Angeles initiative, Workforce LA offers a comprehensive "blueprint for action" which incorporates the major elements of career education** (career awareness/exploration/planning/decision-making)—" a region plan for a Kindergarten through Jobs career development continuum." Workforce LA's mission is to unify the local leadership of industry, education, government, labor and the community to improve the educational delivery system in order to produce a fully qualified workforce.

In **Canada**, career education remains in the forefront of furthering the school-to-work process. Career education practitioners keep abreast of developments through Ken Hoyt's National Career Education Leaders' Communication Network, state professional associations and national meetings such as NAIEC's annual Showcase Conference.

One of the lessons I learned during my years as a corporate manager was that **when you try something and it works – keep it in. Career education works**, and given broad support from industry and the schools which it needs and deserves, it can make a significant difference in **fostering educational improvement, workforce preparation**, and, in turn, **human resource and economic development at all levels**. I've saved all my career education materials; they are as relevant today as they were when this formidable movement began. □